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Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Office for West Africa

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to the request contained in the letter dated 21 December 2007 from the President of the Security Council (S/2007/754), in which the Council called on me to report on the fulfilment of the mandate of the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) every six months. The report covers the period from 1 July to 31 December 2008, and addresses recommendations made in my reports to the Council of 13 March 2007 on cross-border issues in West Africa (S/2007/143) and of 30 June 2008 on the United Nations Office for West Africa (S/2008/426). It focuses on cross-cutting and cross-border developments in the subregion and on activities undertaken by UNOWA of raising awareness of emerging threats and challenges, promoting consultations and synergies at the subregional level and liaising with and assisting the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in the promotion of peace and stability.

II. Recent cross-cutting and cross-border developments

2. In my previous report (S/2008/426), I stated that, despite the significant progress made in consolidating peace and stability in West Africa, challenges remained that threatened to derail the positive developments. Indeed, the situation remains fragile, as the root causes of conflict in a number of West African countries have yet to be addressed in an effective and enduring manner. The known threats of youth unemployment, food insecurity and rapid urbanization, as well as the challenges posed by corruption, irregular migration, human and drug trafficking, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, have been compounded by the adverse impact of the global financial and food crises on the subregion. West Africa was also affected by severe flooding in the course of the rainy season in 2008, resulting in hundreds of deaths and damage to infrastructure, property and crops in several countries. Furthermore, the scourge of coups d'état has re-emerged, as evidenced by the unconstitutional change of government in Mauritania in August, the armed attack on the residence of the President of Guinea-Bissau, João Bernardo Vieira, on 23 November and the move by a group of military officers in Guinea on 23 December to seize power after the death of President Lansana Conté.

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A. Food security and the effects of the global financial crisis

3. Although global food prices have declined after the sharp increases recorded in recent months and local harvests have generally been good, prices for key cereals throughout West Africa remain well above long-term averages. The problem has been most severe in urban areas and countries that are net importers of food. In areas where market dependence is high — that is, where more than 50 per cent of food is bought on the market — rapid increases in global food prices can result in reduced spending on health care, education, clean water, income generation and the maintenance of livelihoods.

4. During the reporting period, the subregion remained heavily affected by the food crisis. Unable to afford available food, large segments of the population have been forced to reduce their consumption or to exclude certain food items from their diets. There is still a concern that the poorest will remain particularly vulnerable as their coping strategies continue to erode. Consequently, there is a continuing need for West African Governments to further promote agricultural production and for donor countries to honour pledges to increase agricultural investment and aid, so as to prevent the destabilizing impact of food insecurity on social cohesion and stability.

5. The global financial crisis and the threat of a global recession have raised new concerns about the potential impact on African economies and on prospects for meeting the Millennium Development Goals. Although the recent decrease in oil prices has, to some extent, eased macroeconomic and fiscal pressure in most West African countries, the broader, global nature of the crisis has generated a sharp fall in the price of primary commodity exports, which has had an adverse effect on terms of trade, government revenue, broader macroeconomic conditions and household incomes in countries whose economies rely heavily on export crops.

6. As a result of the credit crisis, West Africa may also face a reduction in foreign direct investment and remittances received from abroad. Despite assurances given by some major donors, there are concerns that official development assistance may decline as a result of the ongoing financial crisis. Decreased revenue and economic growth could reverse the modest gains achieved in poverty reduction in recent years, undermine the limited progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and increase the risk of instability in a subregion where some countries are fragile or have only recently emerged from conflict.

B. Drug trafficking and cross-border organized crime

7. Transnational organized crime, particularly drug trafficking, is increasingly becoming a major source of concern in the subregion. Several countries reported important seizures of narcotics (cocaine and cannabis) on their territory, unauthorized aeroplane landings most likely linked to drug trafficking, and arrests of Latin American, West African and European nationals involved in illicit trafficking. In Liberia, national law enforcement agencies and the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) police conducted a large operation which resulted in the eradication of some 400,000 cannabis plants.

8. On a positive note, West African Governments are now building their capacity to respond to the challenge at both the national and subregional levels. Drug

trafficking and cross-border organized crime are increasingly viewed critically by both Governments and the public, and efforts are being made to tackle the problem in a constructive manner. The infiltration of drug money into the political arena, for example, featured as a major electoral issue in some election campaigns in the subregion. There is, however, a need for continued awareness-raising at all levels of leadership regarding the harmful impact of drug trafficking and organized crime on governance and security.

C. Elections and governance

9. As I stated in my previous report, elections in West Africa remain potentially destabilizing processes that can result in political violence, economic disruption and social strife in fragile societies. During the reporting period, election-related incidents and tensions were reported throughout the subregion, while some elections were postponed owing to various problems, including logistical and security constraints. At the same time, the subregion registered successful electoral processes, which were conducted in a smooth and peaceful manner.

10. The military coup of 6 August against the democratically elected President of Mauritania, Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdellahi, constituted a setback for democracy in that country and for a subregion that has achieved significant progress in the consolidation of democratic governance. That worrying development was condemned by the international community, which had actively supported the two-year process to restore constitutional governance in Mauritania following the coup d'état of 2005.

III. Activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa

11. During the period under review, UNOWA undertook a series of activities aimed at building the capacity of and strengthening United Nations cooperation with subregional organizations, in particular ECOWAS. Building and reinforcing synergies among United Nations entities in the subregion and collaboratively addressing cross-border challenges to peace and security also ranked high on the agenda of UNOWA. Furthermore, my Special Representative for West Africa, Said Djinnit, continued to support the activities of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission in his capacity as its Chairman.

A. Cooperation with the Economic Community of West African States and other subregional organizations

12. The Office continued to focus on building and strengthening its strategic partnership with ECOWAS as the major organization in charge of promoting integration and stability in the subregion. During his visits to Ouagadougou on 1 and 2 August and 22 October, my Special Representative and the Chairman of ECOWAS, President Blaise Compaoré, discussed initiatives that could be taken to assist fragile States and further support ECOWAS in addressing problems such as food security, drug trafficking and organized crime and the challenges posed by elections. He also participated in the meeting of the ECOWAS Mediation and

Security Council held in Ouagadougou on 2 December and attended the summit of Heads of State and of Government ECOWAS held in Abuja on 19 December.

13. As part of the ongoing strategy to address emerging threats to stability in a coordinated manner, my Special Representative and the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, undertook joint working visits and good offices missions in the subregion. They travelled to Guinea on 7 and 8 July to explore avenues for supporting the country's efforts to restore stability following the recent political turmoil, focusing on the electoral process, security sector reform, governance challenges and drug trafficking. Together with the Minister for Regional Cooperation of Burkina Faso, representing the Chairman of ECOWAS, they also undertook a joint mission to Guinea-Bissau on 25 November to support the efforts of my Representative in that country, Shola Omoregie, and those of ECOWAS, to help restore order following the attack of 23 November on the residence of President Vieira in Bissau.

14. UNOWA has also forged strong tripartite cooperation with ECOWAS and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to deal with the growing threat of cross-border crime and drug trafficking in West Africa, and the three institutions worked closely in preparing for and organizing the Ministerial on Drug Trafficking as a Security Threat to West Africa, which was held in Praia on 28 and 29 October.

15. In the area of human rights and gender, on 21 and 22 July UNOWA participated in consultations organized by the ECOWAS Gender Development Centre in collaboration with the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre and the Women Peace and Security Network Africa to prepare the terms of reference of a region-specific training manual for mainstreaming gender in multidimensional peace support operations in West Africa. UNOWA also participated in an experts' meeting, held in Dakar from 7 to 9 October, to assist the ECOWAS early warning system in designing a comprehensive Web-based forum to serve as a common platform for the exchange of information among key subregional stakeholders, including political and human rights experts. The Office was also represented at the twenty-third meeting of the ECOWAS Committee of Chiefs of Defence Staff, which was held in Conakry from 29 to 31 October, to update the ECOWAS standby brigade road map for future exercises and activities.

16. ECOWAS was also encouraged to take part in events convened by UNOWA, including the expert preparatory meeting on the establishment of a subregional working group on women and peace and security in West Africa, held in Dakar on 28 July, and the regional workshop on the role of security institutions in providing security during electoral processes, held in Conakry from 24 to 26 November. The President of the ECOWAS Commission was invited to brief the quarterly UNOWA meeting of heads of Dakar-based United Nations regional agencies on 27 October, resulting in a fruitful discussion on security issues affecting the subregion. He stressed the potential of close cooperation between ECOWAS and the United Nations, particularly in support of the ECOWAS conflict prevention framework and standby force.

17. As recommended in my previous report, the Office continued to strengthen its partnership with and assist other key regional partners in joint efforts to promote peace and stability. The Secretary-General of the Mano River Union, Abraham Bouré, visited UNOWA on 16 September to pursue discussions on enhancing cooperation between the Union and the United Nations in support of stabilization

efforts in the Mano River basin (Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone) and in building the Union's institutional capacity. He and my Special Representative also stressed the need to identify possible areas of collaboration on critical security issues, including disarmament, demobilization and the reintegration of ex combatants, trafficking in small arms and light weapons and security sector reform. In seeking to create better synergies between the Mano River Union and the United Nations, including in support of the ongoing revitalization of the Union, UNOWA also facilitated a meeting on 17 September between the Secretary-General of the Mano River Union and the heads of Dakar-based regional United Nations agencies. My Special Representative continued his consultations with Union officials when he, together with my Special Representative for Liberia and my Executive Representative in Sierra Leone, attended the summit of the Union, held in Freetown on 10 November.

18. UNOWA is also working to strengthen cooperation with the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel and with the Commission of the West African Economic and Monetary Union, focusing in particular on initiatives to address the challenges of the food crisis in the region.

19. In furtherance of its mandate to mobilize wider international support for regional stabilization efforts, UNOWA initiated contacts with the African Union, the African Development Bank, the European Union, the International Organization of la Francophonie and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa during the reporting period. It also participated in the meetings of the International Contact Group on the Mano River Basin and the International Contact Group on Guinea-Bissau, held in New York on 23 September, and attended the fourteenth ministerial Troika meeting of the European Union and ECOWAS, held in Ouagadougou on 23 October, during which my Special Representative encouraged the European Union to maintain its support for ECOWAS and West African countries despite the ongoing global financial crisis. In subsequent talks with European Union officials, the need to reactivate the ECOWAS-UNOWA-European Union framework for action for peace and security was discussed.

B. United Nations inter-institutional cooperation

20. UNOWA remained actively involved in facilitating linkages among institutions of the United Nations system in the subregion. On 10 July and 6 October, it convened two information-sharing and coordination meetings of heads of Dakar-based United Nations agencies to discuss issues of common concern; such meetings have now become quarterly. Three ad hoc meetings of heads of United Nations regional offices were also held to discuss the situation in Mauritania, cooperation with the Mano River Union and partnership with ECOWAS.

21. On 11 December, the Office convened a brainstorming session with the heads of United Nations regional offices and resident coordinators from the subregion to identify core issues of common concern, to promote strategic thinking and synergies and to strengthen collaboration among United Nations entities. Participants discussed how best they could coordinate their efforts and strengthen their collaboration and work with UNOWA, especially in the areas of crisis prevention and peacebuilding. They identified areas of common interest where they could deliver more efficiently when working together as one United Nations.

22. My Special Representative engaged in regular consultations with representatives of States members of the Security Council when travelling in the subregion. He also organized two meetings with heads of diplomatic missions of States members of the Council based in Dakar on 31 July and 1 December, during which participants exchanged views on cross-border challenges in West Africa and on the role of UNOWA in facilitating collaboration among United Nations entities.

23. UNOWA continued to convene regular meetings of heads of United Nations peace missions in West Africa to exchange views on developments in their respective areas of responsibility and to assess challenges that remain in the area of consolidating peace, stability and democratic processes. Recommendations of the fourteenth meeting, which was held at the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau on 25 and 26 August, focused on increasing information-sharing and joint activities. The meeting also reaffirmed the lead role played by ECOWAS in promoting stability in West Africa, and advocated for a strengthened ECOWAS-United Nations partnership. The meeting was preceded by an inter-mission conference, held in Monrovia on 21 August, attended by United Nations force commanders and military advisers.

C. Governance

Elections and security sector reform

24. Pursuant to the recommendation contained in my previous report that UNOWA engage more actively in building the capacity of West African States and institutions in the area of security sector reform, the rule of law and good governance, the Office held a workshop in Conakry from 24 to 26 November on the role of the security sector in providing security during elections. The objective of the workshop was to highlight the importance of security sector reform in building peace and to strengthen the preparedness of security institutions responsible for maintaining law and order during electoral processes with a view to ensuring that elections in West Africa take place peacefully, in a transparent and credible manner.

25. The workshop was attended by security and electoral experts from West African countries, ECOWAS, the African Union, the International Organization of la Francophonie, civil society organizations and the United Nations (the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone, UNMIL, the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire and the United Nations country team). On the basis of expert presentations and case studies, participants exchanged views and experiences on electoral processes, the role of States and regional institutions and issues related to security sector reform, such as the professionalization of security institutions. UNOWA intends to publish and distribute widely the workshop outcome with a view to triggering follow-up action within the United Nations system, ECOWAS, the African Union and other international, as well as well as civil society organizations.

The coup d'état in Mauritania

26. Following the unconstitutional overthrow, on 6 August, of the Government of the President of Mauritania, my Special Representative undertook two missions to that country, on 9 and 10 August and on 26 and 27 August. He met with the major stakeholders involved in the crisis and reiterated the United Nations position on the

situation, as expressed in the statement that I issued on 6 August and the Security Council's presidential statement of 19 August (S/PRST/2008/30) condemning the coup and reiterating the Council's strong opposition to any unconstitutional change of government.

27. Following the decision taken at the African Union Peace and Security Council meeting held in New York on 22 September demanding the return to constitutional order through the unconditional reinstatement of Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdellahi as President by 6 October 2008 and stating the readiness of the Council to impose more robust measures to isolate those responsible for the coup, my Special Representative encouraged constructive dialogue between the Mauritanian High State Council established by the coup leader and the international community, in particular the African Union. He also represented the United Nations at a series of consultative meetings convened in Addis Ababa by the African Union on 4 September and 10 and 21 November, bringing together the main intergovernmental organizations involved in efforts to facilitate the restoration of constitutional order in Mauritania.

28. Participants in the 21 November meeting reiterated their call for the unconditional release of President Ould Cheikh Abdellahi and his inclusion in the search for a political solution as President. Subsequently, an African Union-led delegation travelled to Mauritania on 6 and 7 December, where it met with the head of the High State Council, General Abdel Aziz, and with President Ould Cheikh Abdellahi. The mission did not register any progress towards a way out of the crisis. During the visit, General Abdel Aziz promised that President Ould Cheikh Abdellahi would be released before the end of the year. The fourth coordinating meeting, held in Brussels on 12 December, took note of the intention of General Abdel Aziz to release President Ould Cheikh Abdellahi and stated that such action would be seen only as a first step towards the search for a viable solution to the crisis.

29. In a statement issued on my behalf on 21 December, I welcomed the release of President Ould Cheikh Abdellahi from house arrest and the removal of other restrictions imposed on him since he was deposed. I reiterated my call for the prompt restoration of constitutional order in Mauritania in the interests of peace and respect for the rule of law in the country. My Special Representative re-emphasized this message at the meeting of the African Union Peace and Security Council held in Addis Ababa on 22 December. While taking note of the release of President Ould Cheikh Abdellahi, the Peace and Security Council considered that that development represented only a partial response to the demands of the international community, as it had not included a return to constitutional order. The Peace and Security Council decided, therefore, that, if by 5 February 2009 constitutional order had not been restored, it would impose measures, including targeted sanctions, against the junta and seek the support of the Security Council in that regard.

D. Cross-border issues

Drug trafficking and organized crime

30. During the reporting period, UNOWA, in partnership with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and ECOWAS, continued to devote particular attention to the issue of drug trafficking and cross-border organized crime in West Africa, underscoring the need for a regional approach to combat those problems. At a

tripartite meeting of ECOWAS, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and UNOWA, held in Abuja on 9 July, it was agreed that the ECOWAS ministerial conference to be held in Praia on 28 and 29 October should address the issue of drug trafficking as a threat to subregional security.

31. The Political Declaration and Regional Action Plan adopted by the ministerial conference and subsequently endorsed at the ECOWAS summit held in Abuja on 19 December, have established the basis for a strong political commitment and a detailed cooperation framework to combat drug trafficking and organized crime in West Africa. The Political Declaration calls on the Security Council and the African Union to support the subregion, and invites the ECOWAS Commission to develop a legally binding mechanism on illicit drug trafficking and organized crime. The Action Plan targets priority areas, including the need to mobilize political leadership and funding at the national level, adopt effective law enforcement and foster national and regional cooperation, adopt an appropriate legal framework for effective criminal justice, deal with the emerging threats of increased drug abuse and associated health problems and establish reliable data to assess the magnitude of the drug trafficking and abuse problems affecting the subregion. UNOWA was identified as a key implementing partner of ECOWAS in pursuit of those priority areas.

32. I welcome the outcome of the Praia ministerial conference and encourage the countries of the subregion to engage resolutely in the implementation of the Political Declaration and Regional Action Plan that they adopted, with the support of UNOWA, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the United Nations system as a whole. I reiterate the appeal I made to the international community during the Praia conference to support the subregion in facing the formidable challenge posed by drug trafficking. In that regard, I wish to stress the critical importance of building capacity in the countries of the subregion and mobilizing resources to help regional States in confronting the threat at the national and cross-border levels.

Sahel region

33. UNOWA continued to follow closely developments in the Sahel region, including, in particular, progress in the mediation processes related to the rebellion in northern Mali and the situation in the Niger. On 23 and 24 October, my Special Representative undertook a visit to Mali, where he held consultations with the President, Amadou Toumani Touré, and other senior Government officials on the security situation in the country's Kidal region and on preparations for a regional conference on security and development in the Sahel. A ministerial meeting was held in Bamako on 11 November to prepare for the forthcoming summit, bringing together all the countries concerned. Recommendations were made for combating terrorism and for cross-border regional security cooperation, including joint patrols and information-sharing. Consultations are continuing regarding the date for convening the summit, at which a declaration and a plan of action on peace, security and development are expected to be adopted.

Mano River region

34. Countries of the Mano River basin deserve particular attention from the United Nations and the international community as a whole as they face common cross-

border problems and share similar post-conflict challenges. These include the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants, food insecurity and youth unemployment. UNOWA, together with United Nations country teams and peace missions, will work to identify and mobilize support for suitable projects to strengthen cross-border cooperation among those countries. UNOWA placed particular emphasis on the fragile situation in Guinea and supported efforts to create conditions for the holding of legislative elections in that country.

35. Following the death of President Conté of Guinea on 22 December and the tensions created by the move by a group of military officers to seize power, I stressed, in a statement issued on 23 December, the need for a peaceful and democratic transfer of power in accordance with the Constitution. Since then, the United Nations has continued to follow closely developments in that country in liaison with ECOWAS and the African Union with a view to contributing to a smooth transition in Guinea, which in the past has played a key role in hosting refugees fleeing conflicts in other Mano River basin countries. It is in that spirit that my Special Representative travelled to Conakry on 3 January to emphasize to national stakeholders and our partners the need for a swift return to constitutional order. The United Nations will continue to support and contribute to these efforts.

Youth unemployment

36. UNOWA continues to host the West Africa office of the Youth Employment Network, a tripartite United Nations, International Labour Organization and World Bank structure launched in 2006 to develop and implement strategies to address the phenomenon of youth unemployment. As part of its ongoing efforts to raise awareness of youth unemployment as a security threat in West Africa, and as a follow-up to its August 2006 report on youth unemployment and regional insecurity in West Africa, the Office has sought the collaboration of the Youth Employment Network in the preparation of a joint action plan.

Human rights and gender

37. In line with its mandate and relevant Security Council recommendations, UNOWA continued to promote and facilitate a harmonized and integrated approach to human rights and gender in the subregion. Progress was made towards the creation of a working group to coordinate and strengthen a subregional approach to the implementation of Council resolution 1325 (2000). On 28 July, the Office convened a meeting of representatives of United Nations regional agencies, ECOWAS, West African civil society representatives and international non-governmental organizations to set up its steering committee and finalize its terms of reference and action plan with a view to completing the process early in 2009.

38. UNOWA also enhanced its cooperation with other partners, including the executive secretariat of the West Africa Civil Society Forum, with a view to formulating a subregional human rights strategy. ECOWAS and UNOWA are joint coordinators of the initiative. The Office participated in the consultative meeting convened in Dakar on 3 November by the regional office for West Africa of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, bringing together heads of country-level human rights sections, as well as those from United

Nations peace missions in the subregion, to develop a harmonized working methodology, define shared objectives and clarify the role of the regional office in promoting human rights in West Africa.

Food security and humanitarian issues

39. UNOWA has continued to play an advocacy role in engaging ECOWAS and West African leaders on the need for vigorous efforts to achieve food security. The Office has encouraged and supported ECOWAS in its initiative to follow up on the plan of action adopted at the ministerial meeting on the food crisis held in Abuja in May 2008. The Office has also continued to mobilize the attention of development partners on the threat to stability posed by food insecurity in the subregion.

40. At the suggestion of UNOWA, Dakar-based United Nations agencies agreed to maintain the issue of food security as a permanent agenda item at coordination meetings convened by the Office. At the invitation of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office participated in the consolidated appeal process for West Africa, held in Dakar on 10 and 11 September, the objective of which was to contribute to the formulation of short-term priorities for humanitarian activities and funding for 2009, with particular emphasis on responding to the food crisis in the subregion. It also participated in the regional workshop convened by the World Food Programme in Dakar on 13 November. The issue of food security was also addressed at the 26 November regional directors team meeting, which adopted the theme of food security and social protection for the poor as the basis of its operational framework to support national priorities through the network of United Nations country teams. At those meetings, appreciation was expressed for the role of UNOWA in mobilizing the United Nations system on the issue of food insecurity as a threat to peace in West Africa and in raising the concerns of the humanitarian community at the appropriate political level.

E. Support to the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission

41. In his capacity as Chairman of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, my Special Representative continued to provide support for the delimitation and demarcation process along the Cameroon-Nigeria boundary and related activities. In liaison with the Chairman of the Follow-up Committee for the Greentree Agreement, Kieran Prendergast, and officials from both countries, he engaged in sustained efforts to ensure a smooth and peaceful transfer of authority from Nigeria to Cameroon in the Bakassi peninsula, which culminated in a final handover ceremony in Calabar, Nigeria, on 14 August. In a message delivered on my behalf on that occasion by the Chairman of the Follow-up Committee, I congratulated Cameroon and Nigeria for the successful and peaceful completion of the handover process. I also reassured them of the continued support of the United Nations as they work together to finalize the demarcation of their land boundary, foster cross-border cooperation and work with their communities to build a stable and prosperous future for generations to come.

42. Since then, efforts have continued to be made, at meetings of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission in Yaoundé on 9 and 10 October and of the Follow-up Committee in Geneva on 15 December, to expedite the boundary demarcation

process, promote confidence-building measures between the two countries and address the needs of the affected populations.

43. In accordance with its mandate, UNOWA continued to assist demarcation and civilian observer teams of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission with human resources, logistical and administrative support. It also assisted the Follow-up Committee in monitoring implementation of the withdrawal and transfer of authority in the Bakassi peninsula.

IV. Observations and recommendations

44. In my previous report, I highlighted progress made towards consolidating peace and security in West Africa, especially in the areas of peacemaking and post-conflict recovery. At the same time, I raised concerns about key challenges posed by potentially destabilizing socio-economic, political and security trends confronting the subregion that required sustained efforts and continued attention by the United Nations and the international community. UNOWA has been proactive in contributing to efforts to address those issues, while facilitating closer collaboration among United Nations entities in the subregion and promoting stronger partnerships between the United Nations and subregional and other organizations active in West Africa, including ECOWAS, the Mano River Union, the African Union and the European Union. I encourage UNOWA to continue working closely with other international organizations and institutions to promote coordinated support for the subregion.

45. In the coming six months, UNOWA will continue to build on the promising approach adopted so far. My Special Representative will continue to contribute to mediation and good offices efforts in the subregion, focusing in particular on joint initiatives with ECOWAS and other regional organizations on conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

46. With respect to the West African security landscape, areas of priority concern include: food security and the impact of the global financial crisis; elections-related issues; security sector reform and the rule of law; human rights and transitional justice; and the implementation of Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) on women and peace and security.

47. UNOWA should be encouraged to continue to play an ever greater role to raise awareness of the link between drug trafficking and peace and security in West Africa and to promote the need for decisive measures to be taken to address that problem in the region. The strong cooperation developed between UNOWA, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and ECOWAS on that issue should also be pursued and strengthened. In concrete terms, UNOWA, working closely with the technical expertise of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, should play a lead role in coordinating United Nations input for the implementation of the ECOWAS Action Plan to combat drug trafficking, adopted at the Abuja summit on 19 December, following the Praia conference held on 28 and 29 October. To that end, I intend to dispatch a technical assessment mission early in 2009 to assess opportunities and requirements for enhanced support for ECOWAS and the subregion in that field, focusing on strengthening the capacity of security, law enforcement and judicial institutions involved in the fight against organized crime in West Africa.

48. UNOWA should also continue to assist Cameroon and Nigeria, within the overall framework of the implementation of the ruling of the International Court of Justice of October 2002, to continue to build confidence across their common borders and to address, jointly, emerging challenges to security and socio-economic development in the region.

49. In conclusion, I would like to express my appreciation to the Governments of West African States, as well as to the ECOWAS Commission and other regional institutions, for their support. I would also like to express my appreciation to entities of the United Nations system operating in the subregion, including the heads of United Nations peace missions, the heads of United Nations regional offices and country teams, and other subregional and international partners for their cooperation with UNOWA. Finally, I would like to thank my Special Representative, Said Djinnit, and the staff of UNOWA and the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission for their contribution to efforts to help promote sustainable peace and security in the subregion.